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THE MISSING RING

A Dramatic Incident at a Dinner Party

By MOLLIE K. WETHERELL

At a dinner consisting of a dozen persons or thereabouts a lady who had recently returned from abroad wore on her finger a ring she had brought from Rome. It had been found in digging the foundation for a house to be erected on the Via Cavour, and, considering the depth at which it lay and its workmanship, archaeologists placed it as belonging to the time of Augustus Caesar. The ring having been noticed by some one sitting near her, the lady took it off her finger, and it was passed around the table for inspection.

The curiosity that had belonged to so distant a period and probably the most interesting to modern European races in history led to a spirited dialogue on the conditions existing at the Eternal City under Augustus, and the ring was forgotten. Later its owner asked for it. Each person who had held it looked at some one else at the table, but no one produced the ring. Several minutes passed, during which a search was being made among the tableware, the brow of the lady who had submitted it for inspection meanwhile darkening. The host, who also looked anxious, arose and, asking the guests to push their chairs back from the table, looked carefully under it, but without success.

There had been no waiters in the room while the ring had been circulated, for the dinner was over and the coffee served. A suspicion therefore arose among those present that it had been stolen by one of their number. This suspicion showed itself to a marked degree in the expressions of those who held it. The host, who sat at one end of the table, and the hostess, who sat at the other, looked at each other in dismay. There was in the incident material for a first class scandal. Then the host, evidently much moved, said:

"It looks as though we had in our midst a thief, and yet I have perfect confidence that such is not the case. Nevertheless every person present is under suspicion. That every one may be cleared of that suspicion I propose that we each and all submit to be searched. I will call in some one who has not been in the room to do the searching, one of my own family, who will have no reason in screening or convicting any individual. You have heard my proposition. Let those who are willing to submit to it say 'Aye.'"

Every one at the table rose except Earle Huxford, a young artist who had passed his novitiate in Florence, Italy, and had returned to America for a short stay. Those present looked at the young man in astonishment.

"Mr. Huxford," said the host with dilated nostrils and flashing eyes, "do you confess yourself a thief?"

"No."

"Then why do you object to clearing this matter up?"

"I do not care to state my reasons."

Huxford sat toying with the stem of a wineglass. Outwardly at least he was cool. He did not meet the gaze of those whose eyes were fixed upon him, some with indignation, some with surprise and some with contempt. There was a short silence, after which the host said to the others:

"I presume we shall be obliged to take Mr. Huxford's action as proof of his guilt, though he virtually pleads not guilty." Then, turning to the lady who had lost the ring, he added, "I cannot replace your property, but I shall send to a friend in Rome, an archaeologist, to procure me the best substitute he can find that is purchasable at any price."

The lady replied that she did not hold her host responsible for her loss, but he insisted that he was responsible and would make it good.

Huxford arose from the table and, looking at the host, said:

"Under the circumstances I must ask your permission to withdraw."

"Madame," said the host to the loser of the ring, "is it your wish to call upon the police to regain your ring?"

"Certainly not; I would not think of such a thing."

"Very well, Mr. Huxford. You may withdraw."

All eyes were fixed on Huxford, who left the room without turning his back to the company, making a slight inclination just before passing through the door. He left a roomful of persons influenced by different emotions. Some blamed the host for permitting him to depart without attempting to secure the ring; some felt that he had acted wisely, but no one expressed an opinion. The episode was discussed in general terms by the company all taking part except Miss Louise Trover, who seemed to have been stunned by it, and Miss Kate Sheldon, who, though she made no comment, showed in her expression that she was much moved. The question, "Do you believe him guilty?" passed around the table. Miss Trover's reply was, "I can't understand it." Miss Sheldon's was, "I have no opinion to express in the matter."

Nothing else than Huxford's guilt—his motives for taking the ring, his consent to stand in the position of a thief if innocent—was discussed for the rest of the evening. One gentleman, a lawyer by profession, proposed a theory that met with more favor than any other. He suggested that Huxford, being an artist, poor and having lived in Rome, knowing the value of the ring, had yielded to a temptation to possess it, then had relied on the character of the company not to push the matter to a disclosure.

The next afternoon while Miss Trover was preparing to go out she was surprised to receive a card bearing the name of Earle Huxford. She was about to send an indignant "not at home" when she abruptly changed her mind and went down to receive the visitor. She walked into the room with a look on her face to indicate that Mr. Huxford under a cloud was not an acceptable acquaintance.

"Louise"— he was beginning when she stopped him.

"Miss Trover, please."

Huxford's face changed. "I came here for an explanation. From your manner I infer that you consider me a thief. Such being the case, I will not attempt to remove the impression. I bid you good morning."

The composed manner that accompanied the words changed that of the lady. With a voice that trembled slightly she said:

"Heaven knows how glad I would be to hear proof of your innocence."

She had not asked him to be seated, and when he spoke again he continued standing. She, too, remained on her feet.

"Do you remember when we first met in Florence, while I was copying a picture in the Pitti gallery?" he asked

"I do."

"A young American lady had just left me. You did not notice her, but she noticed you. I do not relish speaking of favors I have received from women, but in this case it is necessary. That girl wished me for herself—why I know not, for I certainly had no reciprocal desire on my part. She watched you and me during your stay in Florence and when you were gone reproached me for what she called deserting her for you. I declared that, far from deserting her, I had never expressed any other except a friendly feeling for her."

"I was not aware I had a rival."

"Have I not just said that you had not? Certainly not in the woman I have mentioned."

"Go on."

"Then when I was able to do so, after our correspondence, I followed you here."

He paused, seeming to debate in his mind just what to say next; then he said abruptly:

"You wish to know where that ring is?"

She looked up at him inquiringly. "I certainly do."

"If it has not been lost on the way you will find it in one of the folds of the gown you wore at the dinner last evening."

"In *my* costume?"

"Yes, in yours."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I saw it dropped there."

The girl stood as if stunned for a time, then suddenly ran out of the room and upstairs. In a few minutes she returned with the ring. On her face were many thoughts and emotions in confusion, but the one that was growing predominant was a consciousness of a sacrifice having been made to save her from a very trying position.

"What did you mean," she exclaimed almost indignantly, "by admitting that you were a thief when you were—were—what were you trying to do anyway?"

"There were several things for me to do. The first was to prevent your being found with the ring in your dress. You didn't know it was there. Since I saw it placed there I should have had to accuse the person who put it there, and I question if I would have been believed. At any rate, the motives of the person who sought to vent her vindictiveness upon you would have necessarily come out."

"Who was she?"

"Miss Sheldon."

"Miss Sheldon! What object had she to injure me?"

"Your dinner companion had sat between you and her, but had moved to speak to another lady. Our host was telling of an adventure he had had in the Coliseum in Rome. All eyes were turned on him. The ring was on the table near Miss Sheldon. Though I appeared to be watching the speaker, half my glance was upon her. She, too, pretended to be interested in what was said. Presently she let fall her hand on the ring, then lowered both beneath the table. When she raised her hand the ring was not in it. The dress you wore, full of folds as it was, was a convenient receptacle for stolen property."

"Who is Miss Sheldon?"

"One you have dignified with the name of rival."

There were a few moments of silence between Huxford and Miss Trover. The explanation had appalled her. Two emotions struggled within her—horror at the act of the woman who had sought to ruin her and wonder and appreciation for the sacrifice that had been made in her behalf. Silently she moved toward the artist, and he clasped her in his arms.

"I have heard of such women," said Miss Trover presently, "but I did not believe that they existed."

"You have proof in this that they do."

"What is the next step in the drama?"

"To return the ring without an explanation."

"Without an explanation? In that case you will not be vindicated."

"I never can be vindicated. When a man is attacked by an unscrupulous woman his only defense is silence."

Then, after a pause, she said: "One thing I am glad of. I shall partake of your disgrace before the world."

List of Books Added to the Jarvie Memorial Library During the Month of February, 1912.

FICTION.

Bell, J. J.	Jim	B433ji
Bower, B. M.	Lonesome land	B786l
Buckrose, J. E.	Down our street	B925d
Buckrose, J. E.	Love in a little town	B925l
Dell, E. M.	Way of an eagle	D357w
Chantepleure, Guy	April's lady	C459a
Chesterton, G. K.	Innocence of Father Brown	C525i
Coulevain, Pierre de, pseud.	Heart of life	C855h
Farnol, Jeffery	My Lady Caprice	F235my
Gillette, Wm. & Brady, C. T.	Secret service	G479s
Grey, Zane	Riders of the purple sage	G842r
James, M. R.	Ghost-stories of an antiquary	J275g
James, M. R.	More ghost stories of an antiquary	J275m
Macvane, Edith	Tarantella	M176zt
Robin, E. G.	Jacquine of the hut	R632j
Snedeker, C. D. O.	Coward of Thermopylae	S67rc
Sutcliffe, Halliwell	Mistress Barbara	S965ba
Thonger, M. E.	"The Bees"	T486b
Tolstoi, L. N., count	Forged coupon and other stories	T654f
Tolstoi, L. N., count	Hadji Murad	T654h
Walpole, Hugh	The gods and Mr. Perrin	W219g

GENERAL WORKS, PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION AND SCIENCE.

Bergson, H. L.	Creative evolution	575 B49c
Bergson, H. L.	Laughter	150 B491
Dearmer, Percy	Everyman's history of the English church	283 D28e
Ross, C. G.	Writing of news	070 R82w

USEFUL AND FINE ARTS.

Bookwalter, J. W.	Rural versus urban	630 B72r
Cooley, A. M.	Domestic art in woman's education	640 C77d
Marius, G. H.	Dutch painting in the 19th century	759.9 M34d
New, Egan	Chelsea & Chelsea Derby China	738 M61c
New, Egan	Dresden china	738 M61d
New, Egan	Japanese porcelain	738 M61j
New, Egan	Old Chinese porcelain	738 M61o
New, Egan	Royal Sevres china	738 M61r
Perkins, C. C.	French cathedrals & chateaux	726 P44f
Woodwork, The, pub.	Practical upholstery	645 P89p

LITERATURE.

Cooper, F. T.	Some American story tellers	813 C77s

TRAVEL.

American Academy of Political and Social Science	China, social and economic conditions	915.1 A51c
Abbott, F. F.	Common people of ancient Rome	913.37 A12c
Conway, Sir W. M.	The Alps	914.94 C76a
Cooper, A. H.	Norwegian fjords	914.8 C77n
Cruickshank, J. W. & A. M.	Umbrian cities of Italy, 2 v.	914.5 C99u
Jackson, A. V. W.	From Constantinople to the home of Omar Khayyam	915 J13f
Jungman, Nico and Beatrix	Norway	914.8 J95m
Noncrieff, A. R. H.	Heart of Scotland	914.1 M73h
Parsons, W. P.	An American engineer in China	915.1 P26a
Ross, E. A.	The changing Chinese	915.1 R82c
Shore, W. T.	Canterbury	914.22 S55c
Whiting, Lillian	Paris the beautiful	914.4 W59p
Wigram, E. T. A.	Northern Spain	914.4 W59p

BIOGRAPHY.

Graves, A. R.	Farmer boy who became a bishop	92 G77f
Ross, J. D.	Sixty years' life and adventure in the far East	92 R823s

HISTORY.

Eggleston, G. C.	History of the Confederate war, 2v.	973.7 E29h
Perkins, C. C.	Builders of Spain	946 P44b

REFERENCE WORKS.

Jackson, S. M. and others, ed.	The new Schaff-Herzog encylopedia of religious knowledge, 12v.	r203 J13n
Tissot, J. J. J., illus.	Life of our Saviour Jesue Christ, 3v.	r226 T61
Tissot, J. J. J., illus.	The Old Testament, 2 v.	r221 T610
Weaver, Lawrence, ed.	House and its equipment	r728 W36h
Young, W. A.	Dictionary of the characters and scenes in the stories and poems of Rudyard Kipling	r823 K57y

JUVENILE BOOKS.

Brown, E. A.	Four Gordons	jB877f
Cherubim, E.	Pinocchio in Africa	jC527p
Cody, G. E.	Elinor's junior hop	jC671e
Collins, F. A.	Second boys' book of model aeroplanes	J533.6 C71s
Grey, Zane	Young lion hunter	jG845l
Hawkes, Clarence	Shovelhorns	jH392s
Hough, Emerson	Young Alaskans on the trail	jH838y

September 7, 1911.

ESTATE OF GEORGE PETERson Deceased.

Pursuant to the order of ISAAC SHOENTHAL, Surrogate of the County of Essex, this day made, on the application of the undersigned, Executrix of said deceased, notice is hereby given to the creditors of said deceased to exhibit to the subscriber under oath or affirmation, their claims and demands against the estate of said deceased, within nine months from this date, or they will be forever barred from prosecuting or recovering the same against the subscriber

ANNA M. PETERSON,

Pilch & Pilch, Proctors

January 8, 1912.

ESTATE OF AUGUSTA SWOLinsky, deceased.

Pursuant to the order of ISAAC SHOENTHAL, Surrogate of the County of Essex, this day made, on the application of the undersigned, executrix of said deceased, notice is hereby given to the creditors of said deceased to exhibit to the subscriber under oath or affirmation, their claims and demands against the estate of said deceased, within nine months from this date, or they will be forever barred from prosecuting or recovering the same against the subscriber.

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